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OFFICIAL INFORMAL

FOR SA/INS

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SUBJECT: OFFICIAL INFORMAL NUMBER 057 (04/15/04)

Classified by Ambassador Jeffrey J. Lunstead for reasons 1.5
(b) and (d).

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UPDATE ON THE SITUATION IN THE EAST

11. (C) FYI. This is an update to our April 14 front-channel (Colombo 628) about the crumbling of rebel Tiger commander Karuna's forces in the east:

-- The whereabouts of Karuna remain a mystery. Although speculation remains rife that Karuna is either in Sri Lankan military custody or in discussions with the GSL, military contacts are close-mouthed on the subject and have not confirmed contacts with Karuna. There are also rumors that Karuna has left the country. Contacts at the Norwegian-run Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) state that they are unaware of Karuna whereabouts.

-- SLMM personnel have resumed their monitoring duties in the eastern districts that were formerly under Karuna's control and report that the situation there is largely calm and quiet.

-- UNICEF is reporting that a large number (upwards of 150) child combatants were released on April 11 by the LTTE in the east (as mentioned in Colombo 628). This is in addition to 100 or so child combatants who earlier had deserted Karuna's ranks. The total estimate is that upwards of 400-500 children may have been released from the LTTE's clutches in recent days. UNICEF is working rapidly with its local partners in the east to process the children and return them home.

-- The pro-LTTE website, "TamilNet," is reporting that "Lt. Col." Neelan, a high ranking LTTE intelligence operative, was killed by Karuna's men as the rebel commander fled his bases in the east during the LTTE's April 9-10 assault. Neelan (if this is the same fellow and it seems to be) was a close associate of LTTE intelligence head Pottu Amman and, along with Pottu Amman and LTTE leader Prabhakaran, is alleged to have been involved in the planning that led to the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in May 1991.

-- TamilNet has also reported that all 22 MPs in the pro-LTTE Tamil National Alliance (TNA) are scheduled to meet with the Tiger leadership in Kilinochchi on Friday, April 16. This will be the TNA MPs' first meeting with the Tigers since the collapse of Karuna's faction, and may be an opportunity to resolve differences between the majority of the TNA MPs who remained pro-Prabhakaran and those who had demonstrated some degree of loyalty to Karuna. (We would say that those who showed some sort of inclination toward Karuna are in some trouble.)
(POL)

OATH-TAKING FOR JVP MINISTERS?

12. (C) FYI. There are some reports that the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) MPs who boycotted the April 10 ministerial swearing-in ceremony could take their oaths as ministers and deputy ministers within a few days (see Colombo 637 for background). On the other hand, we have heard that President Kumaratunga is on holiday in the tea plantation region of Nuwara Eliya until April 18, which would make any imminent swearing in highly unlikely. Other contacts suggest that SLFP-JVP tensions could be protracted as the party attempts to negotiate their grievances over ministerial appointments with the President. The situation appears up in the air at this point. (POL)

LUNSTEAD